

# ‘Highly Preposterous’: Origins of Scottish Missions

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In one of the most widely used church history texts of the present day it is stated that the 1796 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland “passed a motion that ‘to spread abroad the knowledge of the Gospel among barbarous and heathen nations seems highly preposterous, in so far as it anticipates, it even reverses, the order of nature’ ”.<sup>1</sup> A recent revision of the same book does make clear that the words quoted were not part of any motion, but they still give the impression that the General Assembly, or the speaker in question, was opposed to missions. Such an interpretation was held by Hugh Miller who propagated it first in his paper and later in a book. But Miller was wrong.<sup>2</sup>

Foreign missions scarcely existed amongst Protestants prior to the 1790s. This was hardly surprising. On the one hand, awareness of unevangelised peoples was very limited. On the other, missions ran contrary to the ideal of the national church. If every citizen was to be a Christian, it was natural to think that every Christian must be a citizen. But both these factors were weakening by the end of the eighteenth century. This was particularly so with respect to the new commercial class which traded with foreign lands, and which had inadequate expression in existing structures of the churches. These merchants did not so much seek to exercise Christian leadership by taking over the traditional seats of ecclesiastical authority as by creating new ones — societies patterned on trading companies. It was natural that such societies should be devoted to missionary work, in Scotland as elsewhere.

But there were at least three peculiarly Scottish factors which influenced the rise of missionary enterprise. The most important was philosophical. In the eighteenth century battle against rationalism, the theists had been obliged to protect themselves from arguments based on natural religion by first showing that natural religion was consonant with theism. Only then could they safely move on to revealed religion. Meanwhile, they argued that “the divine origin and authority of Christianity may be inferred from its intrinsic excellence and the great benefits it has conferred on mankind”.<sup>3</sup> The practical result was a spate of sermons on

<sup>1</sup> A. R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution*, Harmondsworth, 1961, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Miller, *The Headship of Christ*, Edinburgh, 1861, pp. 130-186.

<sup>3</sup> Stewart Mechie, “The Theological Climate in Early Eighteenth Century Scotland”, in *Reformation and Revolution*, edited by Duncan Shaw, Edinburgh, 1967, p. 271.

“benevolence”, particularly as found in the creation. Indeed, God had done such a magnificent job as a Creator that there was very little left for him to accomplish as a Redeemer. Perhaps honour is due to the eighteenth century apologists who saved the church from the danger of the hour, but when that particular danger had passed the church was left with a lopsided apologetic. The reaction was not long in coming.

It has been said that even in England Evangelicals were marked by preaching on redemption rather on benevolence.<sup>4</sup> Claudius Buchanan of Cambuslang made the distinction clearer in a sermon at London in 1810. He rejected general benevolence and those who “do not understand that there is any difference between the dispensation of Moses and the dispensation of Christ, except merely in the publication of an inspired book throughout the world”. For Buchanan, “spiritual light” was not given to “a nation or community of men by any system of education, but to individuals”.<sup>5</sup> Ralph Wardlaw of Glasgow preached to much the same effect in 1812. As a product of his age he was quite ready to admit that “the doctrine of a superintending providence cannot consistently be questioned by anyone who is convinced that there is a God, and that the universe owes its existence to his creative power. . . .” But he then argued that such providence was “not *general* only, but *particular*”, in that God had not only set the machinery going but still supervised particular lives and events. As for those who felt that “the necessity of a particular providence may be superseded, by supposing a perfect original arrangement of the universal system”, Wardlaw readily admitted this for the material universe, but felt it “quite too mechanical” for human beings.<sup>6</sup>

If his doctrine of “particularity” was a feature of British Evangelicalism, it was a natural consequence that Evangelicals should reject the idea of an entire people being equally endued with grace. But having rejected general benevolence for the British people, Evangelicals could reject it for other peoples, and extend their particularity to foreign parts. This they did.

But we need not suppose that the dominant philosophy of the eighteenth century died without a struggle. It lived on in many ways, and some of the most esteemed Evangelicals continued to hold odd remnants of it. One such remnant was the belief that before one could preach revealed religion one had to lay a solid basis in natural religion. Thus when missions overseas were

<sup>4</sup> Michael Hennell, *John Venn and the Clapham Sect*, London, 1958, p. 108.

<sup>5</sup> Claudius Buchanan, *A Sermon Preached at the Parish Church of St Andrew . . . before the Society for Missions to Africa and the East . . .*, London, 1810, pp. 14-15.

<sup>6</sup> Ralph Wardlaw, *The Doctrine of a Particular Providence*, Glasgow, 1812, pp. 1, 16.

actually proposed, some Evangelicals and most non-Evangelicals believed that they must teach natural religion first. There is one instance of this belief from an early date, perhaps as early as 1749. The missionary David Brainerd having died in America, his diary was published and an Edinburgh minister, Robert Wallace, complained that Brainerd was wrong in saying that a missionary "ought not to preach morals or such Doctrines concerning Religion and a future state as are founded in nature, or to which men may be most easily led by the convictions of reason, but the pure Doctrines of the fall and our redemption".<sup>7</sup>

Before leaving this subject it must be admitted that we cannot definitely assert why the views held by Wallace were so widespread in Scotland but not in England, though the evidence shows that they were widespread long after the threat of deism had passed. And yet it might be noted that that threat did not so much pass as change. The weakness of a self-regulating and perfect creation was that many who lived in it found it imperfect. The result was a modification of the original theory. The creation was not perfect — yet. But it had in it a self-regulating mechanism for its improvement, which came to be known as evolution. The struggle with this second manifestation of eighteenth century philosophy was to wrench missionary thinking even more violently than the struggle against the original version, but it lies outside the scope of this paper.

The second Scottish factor was professionalism. Scotland was then exporting physicians, engineers and teachers. England was not, or not to anything like the same extent. English missionaries were necessarily "mechanics" or small tradesmen, but the Scots would consider the sending of educated missionaries and some were actually sent, even though in practice the societies in Scotland sometimes had to send anyone they could find. But the assumed availability of educated men may have strengthened the philosophical argument in favour of educated missionaries who could teach natural religion as well as revealed.

The third Scottish factor was the English relationship. In the 1790s Scottish consciousness was weak. Evangelicalism was launched at a time when joint north and south British ventures were in favour, and the missionary enterprise originally took pride in being such a venture. But the pendulum soon swung the other way, and Scottish supporters of missions demanded and got a missionary programme of their own. Initially, however, the movement could be centred in London and its Scottish leaders could be the Scottish ministers in that city. And one of those ministers was John Love, who was to play a vital part in the formation of Scottish missions.

<sup>7</sup> Henry R. Sefton, "The Scotch Society in the American Colonies in the Eighteenth Century", *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, Vol XVII, p. 175.



Love was born in Paisley in 1756 and went to London in 1788 as minister of a Scots chapel with a largely English congregation. By 1795 he was able to pride himself on "a kind of martyrdom of more than seven years" amongst the English, but it does seem that they did not much like him either. In 1800, before his London congregation broke up completely, he moved to Anderston Chapel in Glasgow, where he remained until his death in 1825. It was from John Love that the South African mission station of Lovedale took its name.<sup>8</sup>

But Love's importance derived from his work for the London Missionary Society, formed in response to a call by a Scottish Congregationalist minister at Gosport, Dr Bogue, who wrote in 1794 that only "Pedobaptist" dissenters had no missions. Bogue did attribute some missionary activity to the Church of Scotland, since the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge provided limited funds for work amongst American Indians.<sup>9</sup> The result of Bogue's appeal was not purely Congregationalist, but a committee formed of "one clergyman of the Church of England, two of the Church of Scotland, two Methodists, three Independents, and one Presbyterian Dissenter".<sup>10</sup> The two Church of Scotland men were Love and Dr James Stevens of Crown Court Chapel, London, and the Dissenter was Dr Alexander Waugh of Wells Street Chapel, London, a minister of the Associate Synod famed in later years for his travels through Scotland on behalf of L.M.S. The chairman of the first public meeting was Dr Henry Hunter of Scots' Church, London Wall, who had previously been active with such subsequent Evangelical leaders as Love and James Haldane in the London Corresponding Board of S.S.P.C.K. With such variegated support the committee expressed their desire "to unite with approved evangelical ministers, respectable in their moral conduct, and with all sects of every denomination".<sup>11</sup> According to the zealots of Edinburgh, this invitation was "evidently intended to exclude Arminians",<sup>12</sup> but in fact it only excluded non-Evangelicals. More ominously, Scottish support for L.M.S. was regarded by those same Edinburgh zealots as perfecting the political Union of 1707 by extending it across the divisions which still separated the churches; "the union is now complete; a spiritual union has now taken place, far more important and glorious than the former".<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> John Love, *Letters of the late John Love, D.D., Minister of Anderston, Glasgow*, Glasgow, 1838; Letter #80, 10 February 1795, and passim.

<sup>9</sup> *Evangelical Magazine*, London, September 1794, pp. 378-379.

<sup>10</sup> John Morison, *The Fathers and Founders of the London Missionary Society*, London (1839?), p. 217.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219. Morison quotes this address as having appeared in the *Evangelical Magazine* of January 1795 though in fact it did not so appear.

<sup>12</sup> *Missionary Magazine*, Edinburgh, 16th October 1797, p. 448.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 18th July 1796, p. 46.

On the practical side, the new Society had two secretaries, a banker named W. Shrubsole for finance and John Love for correspondence. And as secretary, Love sought to implant in L.M.S. the Scottish emphasis on natural religion. We are told that there was a difference of opinion in the early L.M.S. between English and Scots, and it may have been on this issue. We are also told he prepared an address for the inhabitants of Tahiti which "would have retarded rather than promoted" the work had it actually been used by the missionaries on arrival, since it presumed that natural religion must be taught before revealed religion.<sup>14</sup> Yet Love's correspondence is not very specific on this issue, though he did keep insisting on the need for educated men, with the added expectation that Scots would be better in this respect than Englishmen.

It was in 1796 that Love's appeals to Scotland brought into being a number of local missionary societies, mostly related to L.M.S. in some fashion. That of Paisley was actually an auxiliary of L.M.S., perhaps because Love was one of their own. Its leading spirit was Dr John Snodgrass, who had preached the annual sermon for S.S.P.C.K. in 1794 and preached the sermon for the new society in the High Church of Paisley in 1796. Snodgrass was more apocalyptic than was usual for that era, not only associating the rise of missions with the fall of the "Man of Sin" but also drawing on Isaiah to prove that missions should be sent to certain tribes mentioned by the prophet and located by Snodgrass in Central Asia. Yet Snodgrass rejected the natural religion argument, preaching on Isaiah that, "No regard seems here to be paid to that favourite axiom with many, that the gospel can only be successfully preached to a people already in a civilised state".<sup>15</sup>

The Glasgow Missionary Society was more independent. The sermon at its 1796 meeting was preached by Robert Balfour, who held the view that the heathen were in utter darkness, though "their remote ancestors could not be ignorant of the will of God". Balfour took the extreme position that natural religion had somehow been so neglected by those ancestors that, "Not a trace of truth remains . . .".<sup>16</sup> How non-Christian peoples had lost natural religion was a problem to other preachers in that decade; a preacher to S.S.P.C.K. in 1791 had declared that "the primeval religion of the lapsed world included the great principles of natural religion", and then went on to speculate that in the course of time true religions were subject to corruption while false

<sup>14</sup> Morison, *Op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>15</sup> John Snodgrass, *Prospects of Providence, respecting the Conversion of the World to Christ*, Paisley, 1796, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Balfour, *The Salvation of the Heathen Necessary and Certain*, Glasgow, 1796, pp. 9-10.

ones were subject to improvement.<sup>17</sup> But Balfour's sermon to the Glasgow society was best remembered by a controversy in the Reformed Presbytery from which several elders and others were excommunicated for having "said a confederacy with them who have said a confederacy against Christ, his pure worship and public interest and glory in the world" by attending the sermon.<sup>18</sup>

The Edinburgh Missionary Society, later called the Scottish Missionary Society with auxiliaries all over the country, even in Glasgow, issued its first prospectus in 1796. This disclaimed any intention of aiming at "a separate interest" from L.M.S. or anyone else, and it was somewhat cavalier in its treatment of the churches of Scotland. "Every missionary to be ordained shall, after having been approved by the Society, be remitted for ordination, to the particular religious connection to which he belongs; and at the same time, shall be considered as sent out by the Society at large, shall equally enjoy the countenance and support of the Society, and shall be accountable to the Society alone for the manner in which he shall fulfil his mission."<sup>19</sup>

There were other societies at Aberdeen, Inverness, Nairn, Elgin and elsewhere, but most of these only developed in 1797 and they were virtually auxiliaries of L.M.S. or private prayer groups with no programmes of their own. But none of these later groups were to trouble the Church of Scotland as did the three southern societies formed in 1796.

The trouble arose through overtures introduced before the General Assembly of 1796 by the Synods of Moray and Fife, one to support the new missionary societies and another actually to take up collections on their behalf. It is the resultant debate which has achieved an undeserved notoriety, and that for three reasons. First, the natural religion argument has been overlooked in subsequent years, and this has meant that phrases have been quoted in a different sense than that in which they were used. Secondly, it has been forgotten that the societies to which money was to be given were at one and the same time expecting support but adamantly rejecting any suggestion of a voice by the Church of Scotland or any other church in their management. Thirdly, it has been forgotten that in the 1790s the Church of Scotland was

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Gerard, *The Corruption of Christianity Considered as Affecting its Truth*, Edinburgh, 1792, pp. 7, 32. Similar ideas appear in John Kemp, *The Gospel Adapted to the State and Circumstances of Man*, Edinburgh, 1788, p. 65; and in Thomas Hardy, *The Progress of the Christian Religion*, Edinburgh, 1794, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> *An Adherence to the Missionary Society of Glasgow defended, At the Expense of being cut off from the Communion of the Reformed Presbytery, etc.*, Glasgow, 1798, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Heron (attributed), *Account of the Proceedings and Debate in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 27th May 1796*, Edinburgh, 1796, Appendix, p. 73.



being subjected to extreme aggravation by some of those same Evangelicals who were most active in and for the societies in question.

That aggravation must be detailed, and not only the aggravation which preceded the General Assembly but also that which followed, since it is all indicative of a certain temper. It was in 1796 that the Haldane brothers began publication, with Greville Ewing as editor and the leading writer, of Edinburgh's *Missionary Magazine*. Initially it was what its title implied, but as the Haldanes moved towards Independency their magazine became a platform for Congregationalism. And well before that there had been in the Haldane group an undertone of opposition to establishments on either side of the border. We have already seen a reference to the Act of Union of 1707 being carried into the spiritual plane, and Scots could be pardoned for supposing that the intention was to replace both establishments with a new and predominantly English alliance of Congregational chapels. Furthermore, there was an obvious connection between L.M.S. and attempts to convert Church of Scotland parishioners to forms of Congregationalism, even though these did not become critical until after 1796. In 1798 was formed the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Scotland.<sup>20</sup> In the same year the annual meeting of L.M.S. closed formally, then "the same spirit of philanthropy" led many of those present to continue informally on the subject of "village preaching" in Britain.<sup>21</sup> What this preaching was may be inferred from a statement by James Haldane and John Aikman in that year to the effect that they would *no longer* speak against personalities or on "the sermons of particular ministers", as "this afforded a handle to those who did not approve our design".<sup>22</sup> In 1799 Haldane was ordained as a Congregationalist, while Greville Ewing left the ministry of the Church of Scotland to train men for itinerant work.<sup>23</sup> Dr Bogue of Gosport, meanwhile, had been training men in Hampshire for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home, which meant Scotland, and two such men were ordained for Caithness in 1798. This was done by English Congregationalists, Presbyterian orders being specifically rejected since "the subordination of sessions to presbyteries, of presbyteries to synods, of synods to general assemblies, in their minds favoured (sic) too strongly of gradations in another communion".<sup>24</sup> This not unnaturally led to the Pastoral Admonition of the General Assembly of 1799 against "those, who, assuming the name of missionaries from what they call the Society

<sup>20</sup> *Evangelical Magazine*, London, February 1798, p. 73.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, June 1798, p. 248.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, September 1798, p. 383.

<sup>23</sup> *Missionary Magazine*, Edinburgh, 17th December 1798, p. 574.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 16th April 1798, p. 160.

for Propagating the Gospel at Home, as if they had some special commission from Heaven, are at present going through the land" and "studying to alienate the affections of the people from their own pastors . . .".<sup>25</sup> That this Pastoral Admonition received the support of a majority of Evangelicals in the General Assembly is significant; by 1799 most Evangelicals had turned against their former allies and were pursuing their Evangelicalism within the Church of Scotland on Church of Scotland lines. Something of the same sort seems to have occurred in the same year with Church of England Evangelicals, resulting in the formation of the Church Missionary Society as a distinctly Anglican alternative to L.M.S.

Another source of aggravation was the casting aside of the official and ancient S.S.P.C.K. which seemed to many to be the obvious body to undertake overseas missions. Had the overtures been presented on behalf of S.S.P.C.K. rather than the newly formed societies, they might well have received general support. But something had happened to S.S.P.C.K. In 1791 that Society was considering a mission to Africa, using "emancipated and converted negroes of Rhode Island" for the purpose.<sup>26</sup> Five years later those same Evangelicals who had been its most active supporters and office-bearers were outside S.S.P.C.K. and were leaders in the new societies. Indeed, they, or some of them, were even going out of their way to attack S.S.P.C.K. for not being Evangelical, a charge which was indignantly though vainly repudiated by a pamphleteer who had stayed in.<sup>27</sup> Why they left is not clear. Most of them were loyal to the Church of Scotland, and not followers of the Haldanes. Perhaps most of them reacted in a church direction after 1799, but if so they did it by influencing the new societies and not by rejoining S.S.P.C.K. Without them that Society began the slow process of decay which made it an archaicism in the nineteenth century, a mere source of endowments to be applied to the works of other bodies.

With that background understood, the actual debate in the General Assembly of 1796 may fall into better perspective. And, while it is capable of a variety of judgments, it was probably a better debate than Hugh Miller was able to envisage. It is true that the General Assembly did not come to any real conclusion.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 15th July 1799, pp. 290-291, reproducing the Admonition in full.

<sup>26</sup> Gerard, *op. cit.*, p. 73, in the Report appended to the Sermon.

<sup>27</sup> "A.H.", *Remarks on a late Pamphlet entitled, A very Brief Account of the Present Attempts to Carry the Knowledge of the Gospel to the Heathen, etc.*, Edinburgh 1796, *passim*. The writer of the "very Brief Account" had been 25 years Secretary of S.S.P.C.K. before turning his artillery against it. In the Report for 1794 there is reference to charges that the Society had more money than it knew what to do with, and as late as 1814 there were proposals that the Society should be joined to another and unnamed society, which proposals were resisted.



but Assemblies have other functions as well. In this case it showed that there were a large number present who distrusted the means proposed for overseas missions, and that the common mind which was necessary for specific action did not exist. The debate also served to educate those present on the matters at stake.

The only detailed account of the debate is in a tract attributed to Mr Robert Heron, ruling elder of Galloway, later to be known as a biographer of Robert Burns and a literary figure much troubled by imprisonment for debt.<sup>28</sup> According to that tract, Heron spoke first and then Dr John Erskine of Greyfriars in Edinburgh spoke on behalf of the societies at Paisley, Glasgow and Edinburgh, he being a leader in the latter. He did seem doubtful about the Paisley society being so entirely under London, but he commended all groups "however different the sects engaged in them".<sup>29</sup> And then came the Rev. George Hamilton of Gladsmuir, whose speech attracted so much subsequent attention.

There is nothing to show clearly that Hamilton was opposed to overseas missions. What he did oppose was preaching revealed before natural religion. "To spread abroad the knowledge of the Gospel among barbarian and heathen nations seems to me highly preposterous, in as far as it anticipates, nay, as it even reverses the order of nature. Men must be polished and refined in their manners before they can be properly enlightened in religious truths. Philosophy and learning must in the nature of things take precedence." Having spoken against the policies of the three societies as he understood them, he then declared that he wanted missionaries "to endeavour to find the people whose state of society is by nature fitted for its (Christianity's) reception, or fitted to render it the blessing for which it was intended". He then asserted, with some degree of truth, that the apostle Paul preached, not to naked savages, but to the inhabitants of cultured cities. Had he stopped there he would have better served his cause and his own reputation, but Hamilton had been trained for the English bar and he could not resist a legal quibble about whether ministers who took up collections for missions did not lay themselves open to "penal prosecution".<sup>30</sup> This last speculation lost him not only the sympathy of his hearers but also the thread of his argument. It did gain him the attention of Dr Erskine, who made him back down on collections, dissociated Protestant from Roman Catholic missions, and then called out, "Moderator, rax me that Bible." With Bible in hand he countered Hamilton's

<sup>28</sup> Heron, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18, 22, 26.

argument by a quotation from St Paul, "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians."<sup>31</sup>

Enough has been quoted to indicate that there was disquiet about the sort of societies which the General Assembly was asked to support, but there does seem to have been some opposition to them just because they were societies. The French Revolution was still very much in mind, and there were some who feared that any autonomous society was bound to oppose the establishment unless it were part of it. This view was made explicit by a legal gentleman, Mr David Boyle, who distrusted the societies since "their funds may be, in time, nay, certainly will be, turned against the constitution".<sup>32</sup>

The final speaker was Dr Hill, Principal of St Mary's College, St Andrews, and leader of the Moderate party in so far as such a thing then existed. His amendment to the overtures was probably the best compromise possible. What finally passed, by a vote of 58 to 46, was a recommendation "to all the members of the Church, in their different stations, to take every competent method of promoting, within the sphere of their influence, the knowledge of the Gospel, and a just sense of the inestimable blessing which it conveys".<sup>33</sup> This was bland enough, and the *Missionary Magazine* promptly compared those who had not supported the overtures to planters in America who denied the Gospel to their slaves.<sup>34</sup> Yet the Heron tract does indicate that Hill, while making all sorts of qualifications in all sorts of directions, specifically intended that his amendment should be understood with regard to missions overseas and not merely at home.<sup>35</sup>

So much for the General Assembly of 1796, but it is unlikely that many of those present realised that a full generation would pass before the matter was again brought before it. The probable reason is that within a very few years missionary enthusiasm had abated, and for those who still maintained an interest the societies were a sufficient means for the work. The Glasgow Missionary Society sent out to Sierra Leone in 1797 what were probably the first wholly Scottish missionaries of modern times, Duncan Campbell and Robert Henderson. If their names are not better known it is because one "turned into the paths of licentious

<sup>31</sup> The phrase "Rax me that Bible" can only be traced back to a source slightly earlier than Hugh Miller's use of it in 1841; see note by Hugh Watt, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, Vol. X, pp. 54-55.

<sup>32</sup> Heron, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>33</sup> *Glasgow Courier*, 31st May 1796, No. 744, p. 2. Also the shorter version in *Scots Magazine*, Vol. 58, June 1796, p. 428, which agree with one another but differ in procedural detail from the Heron pamphlet.

<sup>34</sup> *Missionary Magazine*, Edinburgh, 17th October 1796, p. 158.

<sup>35</sup> D. Mackichan, *The Missionary Ideal in the Scottish Churches*, London, 1927, pp. 88-89, gives a full account of the debate based on Heron.

idolatry. The other fell by the same snares of covetousness".<sup>36</sup> There is another side to this story. The Directors had selected and trained these men, but they were not prepared for the slow and frequently fruitless realities of the missionary field and eventually drifted into the ways of the traders amongst whom they lived. The Directors felt that the missionaries had let them down, but the missionaries may well have had as much cause to complain about the Directors.

Later in the same year six more men sailed for Sierra Leone, Ferguson and Graham of the Glasgow Missionary Society, Brunton and Greig of the Scottish Missionary Society, and Russell and Cappe of L.M.S. The Scots had been commissioned by their own societies who were supposedly equal partners in the venture, but Brunton and Ferguson were ordained by the L.M.S. committee while passing through London to join their ship. True, the Londoners "hoped, from the candor and brotherly affection of their brethren in Scotland, that the measure would not be considered an undue interference with their Missionaries", and the London Scottish ministers assisted at the ordination.<sup>37</sup> Yet one may wonder if an ordination held in a Congregational chapel rather than a Scots church, and contrary to the constitution of at least one of the Scottish societies, did not raise some doubts north of the border.

In the event, the six missionaries were scarcely at sea when they "unhappily differed among themselves, upon some minor points of theology".<sup>38</sup> Of course one man's conviction is another's minor point, but it had always been intended to settle the three couples in different areas so their theological differences were immaterial to the failure of the venture. Both Glasgow men died of fever, their Society holding that this was "very much owing to the imprudence and the dogmatical temper of the missionaries" in settling where they had. In this case "dogmatical temper" seems to have meant not settling where a war had just broken out, but the Society determined for the future "very seldom, or never, to venture any, newly taken from the mechanical professions, immediately abroad as missionaries".<sup>39</sup> Of the Edinburgh men Greig was murdered while Brunton made a fairly good start but was invalided home in 1801 and subsequently sent to Russia.

By 1801 the Glasgow and Scottish societies, John Love having

<sup>36</sup> *Home and Foreign Missionary Record for the Church of Scotland*, No. 1, July 1839, pp. 11-12. Details are to be found in *Glasgow Missionary Society Quarterly Paper* (III), Glasgow, 1828.

<sup>37</sup> *Missionary Magazine*, Edinburgh, 20th November 1797, p. 524.

<sup>38</sup> Morison, *op. cit.*, p. 593.

<sup>39</sup> *Third Annual Report of the Directors of the Glasgow Missionary Society*, Glasgow, 1798, p. 8. In fact there is some doubt as to whether Ferguson could be described as "from the mechanical professions".



taken up the secretaryship of the former, were proposing another joint effort, this time to Jamaica, and this time without any relationship to L.M.S. There were to be eight or ten missionaries, half of the ministers "who have been regularly educated and prepared for the ministry", all under an "able, experienced, and pious clergyman", the latter going out "for a year or two", after which he should judge if "another superintendent" should succeed him.<sup>40</sup> The emphasis on education may have derived from the idea of natural religion, but it may equally well have resulted from earlier failures being attributed to the use of uneducated agents, probably wrongly. But nothing came of the Jamaica scheme of 1801 for missionary enthusiasm was now on the wane and the Society at Glasgow infected with something Love described as "symptoms of criminal languor and distrust".<sup>41</sup>

A few years later Love was complaining of "letting down the net again and again, to catch almost nothing", and of merchants giving token offerings to the Bible Society and presuming nothing more was required of them.<sup>42</sup> By 1814 Thomas Chalmers was regretting that, "A Society may be thrown into discredit by the failure of one or two of its undertakings . . .", and commenting that the very word missionary was "no sooner uttered than a thousand associations of dislike and prejudice start into existence". This "impetuous and overbearing contempt" he held, interestingly enough, to be not so "virulent" in England as in Scotland, where missionary work was held to be "a very low and drivelling concern".<sup>43</sup> Not until the 1820s did opinion change, and that with the first evidence of success from the plantings of other missions. In 1821 the Glasgow Missionary Society did manage to establish a successful work, this time in South Africa, while in 1824 the Scottish Missionary Society finally placed its work in Jamaica on solid foundations and in 1823 began work at Bombay.

But by then the Church of Scotland was ready and able to play an official part. In 1823 Dr Bryce went to Calcutta as chaplain and in the next year appealed to the General Assembly to begin missionary work. This was supported by the Moderate leader, Dr John Inglis, though he felt that "little could be expected from mere preaching to an uneducated and barbarous people".<sup>44</sup> It has been argued that Inglis "placed education foremost, not because he made the mistake attributed to him of requiring civilisation to precede Christianity, but because out of converted savage races he

<sup>40</sup> *Address of the Edinburgh & Glasgow Missionary Societies respecting a Mission in Jamaica*, Glasgow, 1801, pp. 11-12.

<sup>41</sup> John Love, *op. cit.*, Letter #145, April 1802.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter #156, 25th February 1805; Letter #181, 30th April 1814.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Chalmers, *The Utility of Missions Ascertained by Experience*, Edinburgh, 1815, pp. 4, 9, 15.

<sup>44</sup> Mackichan, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

might thus raise indigenous preachers".<sup>45</sup> This argument will not stand. In 1818 Inglis preached to the S.S.P.C.K. that, "Till the human mind be, to a certain extent, cultivated and enlightened, it may be fairly regarded as, in one respect, incapable of entertaining the faith of the gospels".<sup>46</sup> It was in sharp contrast to the sermon preached to the same body four years earlier by Thomas Chalmers who defended S.S.P.C.K. agents, claiming that, "They have tried the species in the first stages of its rudeness and ferocity, nor did they keep back the offer of the Saviour from their souls, till art and industry had performed a sufficient part, and were made to administer in fuller abundance to the wants of their bodies. This process which has been so much insisted on, they did not wait for."<sup>47</sup>

In 1825 the General Assembly at last authorised a quinquennial collection for overseas missions. Meanwhile, both the Glasgow and Scottish societies divided between Church and Seceder factions. The Glasgow Missionary Society based on Church of Scotland principles turned its men and work over to the Free Church in 1844, while the Edinburgh men in India had already made the change before the Disruption. The other Glasgow Missionary Society and its Edinburgh equivalent lasted until 1847 when their work was taken over by the newly formed United Presbyterian Church. Henceforth, Scottish missionary work was to be undertaken by churches. In the intensely ecclesiastical climate of that decade, it was sometimes suggested that the "Great Commission" was given to the apostles and not to societies, and that the promised blessings would be more readily accorded to churches than to private bodies.<sup>48</sup>

In later days it was to be argued that the distinguishing feature of Scottish missions, compared with those of the Church of England, was that they were church missions and not society missions.<sup>49</sup> The difference was more apparent than real. The two major English societies, C.M.S. and S.P.G., were expected to

<sup>45</sup> George Smith, *The Life of Alexander Duff, D.D., LL.D.*, London, 1879, Vol. 1, p. 34.

<sup>46</sup> John Inglis, *The Grounds of Christian Hope*, Edinburgh, 1818, p. 16. This very cautious phrase is not truly indicative of the strength of his argument, but at no point is it easy to quote him.

<sup>47</sup> Chalmers, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13. The argument against teaching natural religion first was also put before the S.S.P.C.K. in their 1817 Sermon, by Andrew Thomson, *The Ultimate and Universal Prevalence of the Christian Religion*, Edinburgh, 1817, pp. 29-30.

<sup>48</sup> Edward Irving, *For Missionaries after the Apostolical School, etc.*, London, 1825, p. 123, was one of the earliest writings on this theme, though his development of it was not typical.

<sup>49</sup> Mackichan, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-102.

merge or come under common church direction in 1841.<sup>50</sup> This was in response to the ideal of the church then being taught, but the new forces unleashed by Tractarianism blew the two societies apart instead of bringing them together. In a milder fashion this paralleled the Scottish Disruption, the major difference being that the Church of England then had no legislative structure to be disrupted. On the subject of ecclesiastical control of missions the Church of England was no less concerned than was the Church of Scotland, though the argument in England centred on the place of the missionary bishop as a new apostle.<sup>51</sup>

The real difference was whether one taught and then preached, or preached and then taught. By and large the English tried one system after another until something worked, while the Scots normally taught first, founding their colleges in Bombay and Calcutta and Madras. There is abundant evidence that their aim was to "prepare the native mind" for the Gospel,<sup>52</sup> and to do this by teaching "on the testimony furnished by the light of nature, to the existence, attributes, and moral government of God, and the duty and destiny of man", before teaching Christianity itself.<sup>53</sup> And yet one must treat this evidence with caution. When Alexander Duff replied to those who felt that the work was bringing in too few converts he advised them not to "overlook the bearing of present labours, as preparatory, on the future vintage of ripened souls".<sup>54</sup> We know what he meant, but it must have been a considerable temptation for missionaries whose work was proceeding more slowly than that of some other mission to argue that they were really preparing the ground for a flood of converts in the near future. They could not only reassure their impatient supporters at home but also reassure themselves. It may have been for this motive, though in view of his search for traces of natural religion in Africa it could well have been through disinterested conviction, that David Livingstone made an entry in his diary in 1853. "Future missionaries will be rewarded by conversions for every sermon. We are their pioneers and helpers. Let them not forget the watchmen of the night. . . ."<sup>55</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Eugene Stock, *History of the Church Missionary Society, its Environment, its Men and its Work*, London, 1899, Vol. I, p. 389.

<sup>51</sup> E. B. Pusey, *The Church, the Converter of the Heathen, etc.*, London, 1839, is the clearest expression of the church theme in Anglican missionary thinking.

<sup>52</sup> *Home and Foreign Missionary Record for the Church of Scotland*, Old Series, Vol. 1, June 1838, pp. 19-20.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, August 1838, p. 61.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, New Series, Vol. II, January 1842, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> I. Schapera, *Livingstone's Private Journals, 1851-1853*, London, 1960, p. 168.